

Health & Science



African-Americans Of Asthma Risks

The American Lung Association has declared May as Breathe Easy Month to create awareness of the growing problem of lung disease which has a significant impact in the African-American community. Today more than 2 million African-Americans in the United States suffer from asthma, a potentially life-threatening lung disease. In 1993, asthma rates were 22 percent higher in African-Americans than among Whites. And, although African-Americans represent only 12 percent of the U.S. population, they experience over 21 percent of all asthma deaths.

As both a pediatric lung specialist and the parent of a child with asthma, Dr. Leroy M. Graham, Jr. knows firsthand of the devastating impact asthma can have on young children.

"My son Max was diagnosed with asthma when he was about five-years-old but the sings were already visible during the first two years of his life," says Dr. Graham. "Max would often experience shortness of breath, frequent, long bouts of colds, and disturbed sleep."

As he grew older, Max's asthma attacks would result in excessive coughing and problems with breathing. Sometimes the mucous that would fill his airways during an attack would cause him to gag and vomit.

Today, because eight-year-old Leroy Maxwell (Max) Graham III has learned to manage his asthma, he rarely has to take time off from school and he can run and play like other children his age. As a result, they endure numerous hospital emergency room visits and multiple hospitalizations.

"One way to combat misdiagnosis of asthma is to be aware of the signs that indicate your child may have asthma," says Dr. Graham. "Look for symptoms such as fast or labored breathing, long and frequent colds, coughing, wheezing, or the inability to keep up with similar aged children during play or exercise."

Asthma is characterized by the increased reaction of the airways to various "triggers" such as second-hand smoke, cold weather, exercise, outdoor air pollution, allergies reac-

tions and excitement or stress. It is the leading serious chronic illness among children resulting in more than 10 million lost school days annually.

If your child is diagnosed with asthma, the American Lung Association offers educational programs to help children and their families cope with lung disease.

"The American Lung Association's Open Airways For Schools program is offered in over 3,000 schools in 38 states," says Jacqueline D. McLeod, MPH, Med., President of the American Lung Association. "Through Open Airways, children learn to recognize what triggers their asthma and what they can do to avoid an asthma attack."

Asthma doesn't have to be a life-threatening or debilitating disease. If your child has asthma or if you want information about other forms of lung disease, contact your local American Lung Association at 1-800-LUNG-USA (1-800-586-4872) during Breathe Easy Month and all year round.

Overwork Can Be Fatal

Overwork is bad for your health and can kill you, British researchers said.

It can bring on heart attacks, bronchitis or even violent behavior, said Susan Michie and Anne Cockcroft of London's Royal Free School Hospital and School of Medicine.

The researchers argue that employers should be held responsible for preventing work overload and stress and provide help to deal with work-related illness. "The empirical research that exists suggests that higher workloads do increase disease and death rates," they said in a report in the British Medical Journal.

"In Japan, there is even a recognized syndrome of 'death from overwork.'"

The pair cited Danish, Italian, Swedish and British studies that supported their theory.

A Danish study which followed 2,465 bus drivers over seven years showed the incidence of death and hospital treatment in those with higher workloads was more than twice that in the group with easier jobs.

"Increased pace of work over the preceding five years and a lack of social contact with colleagues during spare time were also associated with an increased risk of heart attacks," they added.

In a separate study of Italian railwaymen, researchers discovered that workers with high physical activity and low or medium job responsibility were associated with greater risk of chronic bronchitis or violence.

"It seems that overwork can kill, but that we know precious little about when, who and how," the researchers said, calling for more research and preventive remedies.

"We also need government strategies and legislation to increase employment, reduce the working week, and monitor and intervene to prevent health and safety hazards at work, which include overwork."

Heart Attack Inheritance

An inherited factor that makes blood more likely to clot may indicate a higher risk of heart attacks than smoking or high cholesterol, doctors announced last week.

The study was reported in the New England Journal of Medicine, and showed that in 20 percent of 139 people studied, the molecule that appears on blood platelets, is strongly associated with heart attacks that occur before age 60.

Called PLA2, the factor appears to be equally dangerous to men and women. It appears to bring on heart disease more often and from five to 10 years earlier than in people without it.

It has long been known that family history is important in risk of heart attacks. One of the first questions doctors ask is about the history of heart disease in a family. The discovery might help explain why heart disorders seem to run in families.

People testing positive for PLA2 could take steps to reduce their risk. Such steps can include anti-clotting medications that target the molecule and lowering cholesterol and stopping smoking. A blood test that can identify people who carry the factor is being developed.

The study was done by doctors Paul Bray, a hematologist, and Pascal Goldschmidt-Clermont, a cardiologist, along with several colleagues at the

Johns Hopkins Medical Institution in Baltimore. They worked with 71 persons with heart disorders, comparing them with 68 persons with no symptoms. The findings suggest it could be the most important protean in the development of heart attacks.

Biochemist Kenneth Mann says that until now most platelet disorders have been associated with bleeding diseases. "The reason for more risk is either because you're more prone to form

blood clots, or because you don't have enough of the molecules (that slow clotting). Or in this case because you potentially have something wrong that makes this receptor more active," he added.

The receptor molecules found on blood platelets act like Velcro, helping platelets stick together to stop bleeding. The abnormal clotting tends cut off blood flow to the heart muscles, causing a heart attack.

Oregon Tissue Bank Becomes Part of National Network

Community Tissue Services—a department of Community Blood Center of Dayton, Ohio—has acquired the Oregon Tissue Bank.

This purchase of assets from Legacy Emanuel Hospital & Health Center expands local and west coast tissue banking.

This also enables a new partnership with organ procurement and organ donation networks around the nation.

Community Tissue Services, accredited by the American Association of Tissue Banks, maintains an extensive national network of tissue and organ banks through affil-

iation with more than 2,200 hospitals and physicians around the country, including Legacy's four hospitals.

"This greatly increases our ability to meet the needs of our patients, through expanded tissue and organ availability," says Legacy's Clinical Laboratory Director, Dr. Juan Millan. He adds, "The physicians, surgeons and tissue bank staffs will be able to access expanded tissue selection, now from all over the country—to include skin, bone, cartilage and connective tissue. Most importantly, what is needed here in our community will now be available."

Community Tissue Services will

provide increased local access to needed tissues and organs as well as:

- Increase volume of tissues available to physicians and surgeons,
- Continued commitment to the education and support of donor and family-related activities,
- Enhanced collaborative relationships with the Oregon Donor Program, community and regional tissue transplantation organizations, including regional tissue and organ banks, and
- Ongoing educational opportunities for the public and health professionals.

Major Health Bill Passes Senate

The Senate approved a health insurance reform bill that would make it easier for people to stay insured when they switch jobs or are laid off.

The bill would restrict insurers' ability to deny or limit coverage for people with health problems. Disabled people, the self employed and small businesses would have easier access to coverage.

Taxpayers would also be able to deduct premiums for long-term care. The bill does not, however, do much for those in jobs that don't provide coverage.

The provision that requires insurers to treat mental illness on an equal basis with physical illness, may not survive because of the staggering costs to private employers and the government.

The legislation, sponsored by Nancy Kassebaum R-Kan. and Ed-

ward Kennedy D-Mass., passed the Senate unanimously, but faces problems in the House. Congressional Republicans want to include tax sheltered medical accounts and malpractice reform -- proposals that president Clinton says he will veto.

"It's an issue of fairness," said economist Paul Fronstin "The bill makes it fair for people who have been paying into the system. It makes sure they can get coverage somewhere else if they change jobs."

Sponsors say about 25 million Americans would benefit from the legislation. Most would be covered under employer health plans. A smaller number would be buying coverage on their own.

The bill's strongest protection is for people joining an employer plan, or switching from one plan to another.

Insurers could limit or deny coverage for a "pre-existing" condition for no more than 12 months.

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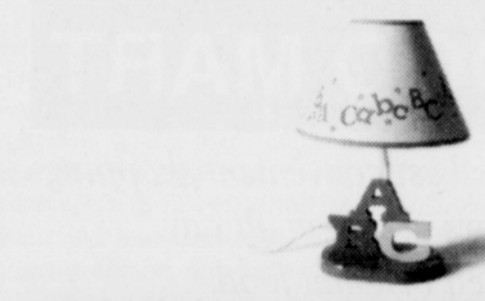
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- ❖ Don't let children climb, build treehouses or play in trees near power lines.
 - ❖ Don't let children fly kites near power lines, or in rainy weather (never use any string containing metal or foil).
 - ❖ Teach children to stay out of electrical substations and other areas marked "Danger: High Voltage."
- Exercise caution and use common sense around electricity, and teach your children to do the same. When it comes to kids and power lines, safety is no accident.



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